

## Notes

### Bronzes in Bedford Museum

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THE COLLECTION of bronzes in Bedford Museum is not large. It does, however, deserve to be better known. The collection consists of part of the large Wymington hoard; an unprovenienced dirk; a spearhead found between Kempston and Elstow; several lumps of ingot bronze; a palstave from Rickmansworth, Middlesex; and a socketed axe from Scarborough, Yorkshire. Six of the Wymington axes, the spearhead and some of the lumps of raw bronze were illustrated by the Rev P. G. Langdon on plate 5 of the *Bedford Modern School Museum Guide* of 1925.

#### 1. *Dirk—unprovenienced*

The dirk (1) has no history and its find-place is not known. It is complete, but is broken in two pieces. The total length is 32.5 cm. The dirk has a narrow blade and a trapeze-shaped butt with two notches.

Rapiers and dirks have been the subject of a number of studies by Mrs B. A. V. Trump.<sup>1</sup> She has classed weapons less than 21.6 cm. in length as daggers; those of 21.6 cm. to 35.5 cm. as dirks; and those longer than 35.5 cm. as rapiers. On this basis the Bedford Museum weapon is a dirk. Its butt form was classed by Mrs Trump as of the 'Thetford class', though our weapon is omitted by her. This class, named after a well-known rapier in the Sir John Evans collection of the Ashmolean Museum<sup>2</sup> is known in approximately equal numbers from the Fenland area and Ireland. If the Bedford Museum example is a local find, the former area can be extended into the middle Ouse, but without more exact knowledge of its provenience we cannot be certain of this. These weapons are thought to date to around the twelfth century B.C.

#### 2. *Spearhead—between Kempston and Elstow*

The spearhead (2) has little history. Found before 1925, at an unknown spot between Kempston and Elstow, it was accessioned by P. G. Langdon (museum number, 3441). It has a flat blade, originally leaf-shaped, but now with some damage to the edges. The socket is circular-sectioned, but becomes diamond-shaped on the blade. There are two slight loops on the base of the socket. The

spearhead is 11.5 cm. long.

There is a similar but slightly longer example of this middle Bronze Age form of spearhead from Northampton,<sup>3</sup> and Luton Museum have one from Sundon.<sup>4</sup>

#### 3. *Socketed Axe—Scarborough*

The Scarborough socketed axe (3) was presented to Bedford Museum by P. G. Langdon, curator 1919-33, and accessioned by him (museum number, 3604). The exact find-spot is unknown. The axe has a square socket, and there are three broadly-spaced ribs on the face, which widens into a splayed cutting-edge.

This is the common Yorkshire type of late Bronze Age socketed axe, found in a wide range of hoards.

#### 4. *Palstave—Rickmansworth*

This palstave is another object presented to the collections of the old Bedford Modern School Museum by P. G. Langdon, and accessioned by him (museum number, 3605). Save for a note that it was found at Rickmansworth, the details of its history are unknown. The axe has a single rib on the face below the stop-ridge and there is a loop in the side.

This middle Bronze Age form of palstave is found in Northamptonshire in looped examples from Aston-le-Walls<sup>5</sup> and Everdon,<sup>6</sup> and in an un-looped example from Arlingworth.<sup>7</sup> I know of no Bedfordshire examples.

#### 5. *Bronze fragments* (not illustrated)

Langdon<sup>8</sup> illustrated fragments of lump bronze from Toddington and Fancot. Bedford Museum has these and a fragment from Ickwell, of unknown history. This last named does not appear to be either of the pieces of bronze in the hoard once owned by John Harvey of Ickwell Bury and now lost.<sup>9</sup> John Harvey seems to have been something of a collector for he had material from Sandy, of the pre-Roman Iron Age, the Roman period, and also the two fine Anglo-Saxon Buckelurnen, now in the British Museum,<sup>10</sup> and the finds from a Roman burial found at Ickwell in 1845, now in Bedford Museum, and including the beautiful deep red-purple glass jug.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that the frag-

ment of lump bronze from Ickwell came from his collections, and equally it is to be asked if the provenience is not more accurately described as 'east Bedfordshire' in view of Harvey's collecting.



Fig 1. Bronzes in Bedford Museum.

6. *Wymington Hoard* (not illustrated)  
The *Bedford Modern School Museum Guide* Bronze Age plate, (pl 5), shows six of the axes from the Wymington hoard. This is the only large hoard of the late Bronze Age from Bedfordshire, or as far as I am aware from the Nene valley.<sup>12</sup> It was found in 1860 on a site variously described as 'Manor Farm' and 'Mr Goosey's Farm',<sup>13</sup> in all probability the same place. The hoard was split up

soon after finding, but some of it came into the possession of Sir John Evans who recorded the hoard for the first time in the first edition of his *Ancient Bronze Implements* (1872), and who stated he had some of the axes.<sup>14</sup> Two of these were later presented by his son, Sir Arthur Evans, to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, but the whereabouts of any other axes Evans may have had are unknown to me. Neither the City Museum, St Albans, nor the British Museum, both of whom have material, including Bedfordshire finds, donated by Evans, include any axes from Wymington in their collections.

Thomas George, writing in *V.C.H. Northants*,<sup>15</sup> did not record that Northampton Museum, of which he was curator, 1885-1921, had two of the axes in their collections, though he mentions the hoard. Worthington Smith, in *V.C.H. Beds*,<sup>16</sup> had no knowledge of the hoard's whereabouts. Langdon<sup>17</sup> illustrated six of the eight axes in Bedford Museum, but seemed to be unaware that many of the axes were in the collections of the old Bedford Literary and Scientific Institute. These, we may assume, were once the property of the Bedfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society. Casts of 38 of these axes were made by Mr F. G. Howard for the late Mr C. E. Freeman in 1931, and for many years these casts formed the principal exhibit of bronzes in Luton Museum. The dispersion of the collections of the Bedford Literary and Scientific Institute in 1959 allowed Mr Freeman to acquire 19 of the originals, and some of these are now exhibited in the new Bronze Age exhibit of Luton Museum.<sup>18</sup>

The five surviving casts which match originals demonstrate the accuracy of Mr Howard's work; and allow good and useful drawings of the axes to be made. Nineteen axes are known from the 1931 casts, and the various museums with parts of the hoard have 31 axes. Of all the known axes, both extant and known from casts, it is hoped to provide illustrations and a discussion in a future issue of the *BEDFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL JOURNAL*. Perhaps by then the remaining axes of the 'about 60' which the Wymington hoard is known to have contained will have been traced.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>*P.S.A.S.* 93 (1959-60) 1-15; *P.P.S.* 28 (1962) 80-102.
- <sup>2</sup>Evans *Ancient Bronze Implements* (1872) fig 316.
- <sup>3</sup>Northampton Museum, D68/1938-39, unpublished.

<sup>4</sup>*Beds. Arch. J.* 2 (1964) 22 and 32 (not illustrated).

<sup>5</sup>Northampton Museum, D85/1954-55.

<sup>6</sup>Northampton Museum, D76/1954-55; Northampton Museum also have an unlooped palstave from Everdon with a plain face (no. D77/1954-55) but there is no evidence of association between these two.

<sup>7</sup>Northampton Museum, ZL 7 (154).

<sup>8</sup>*Bedford Modern School Museum Guide* (1925) pl 5.

<sup>9</sup>*Ant. J.* 34 (1954) 232 and pl 26.b.

<sup>10</sup>B.M. 1937, 11-11, 1-9.

<sup>11</sup>*P.S.A.* 1 (1850) 74; *V.C.H. Beds.* II (1908) 9.

<sup>12</sup>Wymington is nearer to being a Nene rather than an Ouse parish; there is a large Ouse valley hoard from New Bradwells, Bucks., (*Rec. Bucks.* 9 (1909) 431-440 with pl opp. 431; and *J. Northampton Mus.* forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup>respectively Evans and George; see notes 14 and 15.

<sup>14</sup>Evans *Ancient Bronze Implements* (1872) 113 and 466.

<sup>15</sup>*V.C.H. Northants.* I (1902) 143.

<sup>16</sup>*V.C.H. Beds.* I (1904) 169.

<sup>17</sup>*loc. cit.* in note 8.

<sup>18</sup>Luton Museum 71/59 (originals).

## Postscript on the Iron Age finds from Felmersham Bridge

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THE BRONZE FISH-HEAD SPOUT and handle with bovine escutcheons found in the gravel near Felmersham Bridge in January 1942 were accompanied by a much damaged bronze bowl with a riveted base and fragments from the vessels of the fish-head spout and the bovine-headed handle. With these were a large quantity of pottery, mainly of a thick coarse buff ware. These are all now in Bedford Museum.<sup>1</sup>

During January 1969, a lorry driver (name unknown) delivering a Roman sarcophagus from Eaton Socon to Bedford Museum observed the Felmersham collection and volunteered the information that he was present at the time the finds were made. He stated there were 'lots of other things', including a bronze bowl, diameter 3 ft., with drop handles.<sup>2</sup> He did not know whither they went. A few days later he sent to the museum a small bundle containing sherds of pottery and a small shale ring, which it is the intention of this note to publish.

1 Fragment of a small shale ring, diameter 5.25 cm., oval in cross-section, 1.2 cm. by 0.8 cm.

It is difficult to suggest an exact use for this object. It does not seem large enough for a bracelet for it is less than half the diameter of the shale bracelet from the woman's grave at Stanfordsbury.<sup>3</sup> The object does, however, make an interesting addition to the known corpus of shale objects in Belgic contexts. Rich Belgic princes who could afford costly imports of wine and bronzes from the Roman world also imported shale vessels and trinkets, originating in the shale industry of the Kimmeridge outcrop, Dorset. Apart from the Stanfordsbury bracelet, Bedfordshire finds include the two tall vases from a burial at Old Warden,<sup>4</sup> while two fragmentary vases and what could be either a rim fragment from a third vase or perhaps a bracelet were found in a rich grave at Harpenden, Herts.<sup>5</sup> There is a tazza from Barnwell,

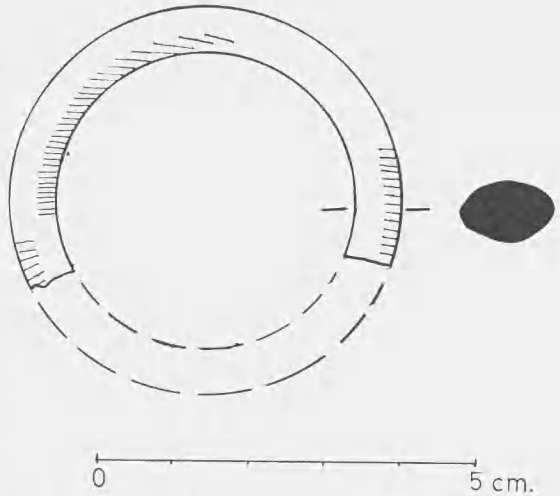


Fig 2. Shale ring from Felmersham.

near Cambridge,<sup>6</sup> and two graves at Great Chesterford, Essex, had tazza-like vessels without the foot-stand.<sup>7</sup>

- 2 Large wheel-made vessel of grey ware with sandy inclusions giving rough surface. The vessel, which is about two-thirds extant has a well-formed out-turned rim, and a slight but distinct collar at the base of the neck. The only decoration is two deep grooves well up on the shoulder. The base is flat with a distinct foot-ring. Height 22.5 cm. Rim diameter 8.8 cm.
- 3 Rim sherd of bowl of dark grey, smooth surfaced ware, with an almost black, burnished external surface with regular horizontal striations. Rim diameter 13.6 cm.
- 4 Large rim sherd of dark pink-brown ware with fading steely grey almost metallic finish. Grooving on the body of vessel from which this came. Rim diameter 24.0 cm.
- 5 Base and body sherd of flat based vessel of black, corky ware with brown surfaces. Groove